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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by UNANIMA International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. On the occasion of this 46th session of the Commission on Social Development, relevant to the priority theme of **Full Employment and Decent Work for All,** the NGOs endorsing this statement emphasize that Women play a vitally important role in economic growth and the reduction of poverty worldwide. When women have greater access to financial resources they are more likely to make decisions benefiting their households in terms of improved nutrition, education, and health — all reflected in the MDGs. We see the major contributions that women can make in poverty reduction in the microfinance movement which has emerged over the last few decades and grants women access to credit markets through small loans. It has helped poor women smooth consumption and increase income-generating activities to improve the quality of life for themselves and their households.

2. However, gender discrimination in labor markets, lack of meaningful employment — particularly in the formal sector — minimal opportunities and few development resources focused on women persist worldwide. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), 70% of the world's 1.3 billion absolute poor are women.[1] Women are too often shut out from working in the formal economy, which generally provides higher incomes, improved working conditions, regulations and social security. In developing countries, women represent over 60% of workers in the informal economy outside the agricultural sector.[2] Even when women do obtain employment in formal sectors of the economy, they earn 20 to 30% less worldwide than their male counterparts.[3]

Lack of real employment opportunities drives the migration of labor. Women represent a rising percentage of those who leave their countries in search of work contributing to a major "brain drain" in countries of origin. The migration of women divides families and those remaining behind become reliant on remittances, which are often subject to high taxation in origin and destination countries.

3. Women migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. One stark example of this is human trafficking, in which over 700,000 women and children are victims of trafficking each year for sexual exploitation and forced labor according to the UNODC.

4. Besides the inadequate international and domestic gender-focused development resources, one chief contributing factor to the lack of meaningful employment opportunities is that women frequently have little organized voice in politics and policymaking and, hence, in how resources are best allocated to improve income-generating activities and improve overall societal welfare and equality. We offer several positive examples in this area which the international community should examine replicating elsewhere in environmentally-specific contexts. For example in Burkina Faso, the ILO and the Danish Development Agency have recently helped design a Social Providence Fund for Informal Economy Workers that will extend social coverage for health care to workers who are currently

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[1] International Labour Organization. "Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM)", http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/about/index.htm, Accessed 07 November 2007.

[2] International Labour Organization. *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture.* (Geneva: International Labour Organization-Employment Sector, 2002), 6

[3] International Labour Organization "Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM)", http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/about/index.htm, Accessed 07 November 2007.

organizing to form a union in the informal sector.[4] In 1972 in India, the Self Employed Women's Association in India was registered as a trade union and its membership now stands at nearly 960,000. SEWA strives for the "idea that the self-employed, like salaried employees, have a right to their wages, decent working conditions and protective labor laws".[5] Rwanda has made significant progress in women's participation in political life through the implementation of affirmative action. The outcome can be seen through facts such as that 30% of decision-making related positions are now assigned to women.[6]

5. Our own NGOs have been working to provide quality education for more women particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, while at the same time promoting public-private partnerships which enhance the possibility for these women to work in the formal sector. We are also concerned with the increasingly higher rate of HIV infection particularly for young women and ask that governments everywhere in the world pay attention to the links between decent work for women, women's empowerment and education to bring about a lowering of this rate.

6. We recognize and applaud the efforts of the international community to focus more attention on increasing and enhancing the resources used towards development geared towards gender equality. This is reflected in the theme for the 52nd session of CSW, "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women" as well as the 2008 Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in Qatar, and the 46th session of the Commission on Social Development, "Promoting Full Employment and Decent Work for All". However, this is not enough and these issues must continually remain on the international community's agenda. Governments and NGOs need to find ways to collaborate with one another, with international and regional organizations, and with workers and their organizations, to create and implement changes that generate employment. Creating sustainable, productive employment opportunities for women and strengthening institutions, policy and legal frameworks that increase gender equality should be key priorities for the international community and all governments.

7. Recommendations

We recommend:

1. ***Increase resources for gender-focused development and employment generation-*** **Committing more and predictable funding flows that specifically focus on creating and improving employment for women, including assistance to design and implement policies to attract investment that creates long-term, sustainable jobs and to create an environment where women workers, entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and collectives can thrive will yield great positive benefits.**

2. ***Focus on macro, in addition to micro-level, gender-inclusive economic policies-*** **The inability for women in poverty to access financial services is a major barrier for women**

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[4] International Labor Organization. "Women in the workplace: New ILO report highlights how action in the world of work can help reduce maternal deaths." http://www.ilo.org/global/About_the_ILO/Media_and_public_information/Feature_stories/lang--en/WCMS_084620/index.htm, Accessed 16 October 2007.

[5] UNESCO Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme "A Women's Self-help Organization for Poverty Alleviation in India: SEWA India, http://www.unesco.org/most/asia1.htm, Accessed 7 November 2007

[6] Social Watch. *In Dignity and Rights: Making the Universal Right to Social Security a Reality.* (Montevideo: Third World Institute, 2007) 87.

to create, maintain and expand their small or micro-businesses. While microfinance services such as small loans are important tools to help smooth income levels and help generate revenue, and resources for such activities should be increased, microfinance is not a substitute for macro-level institutional and policy changes focused on women and creating greater employment opportunities in the formal sector.

3. ***Allocate more funding and implement policies to improve education for women*-Improving access and the quality of education for women and girls is a fundamental necessity for enabling women to seek and maintain employment. Educational opportunities such as vocational training, as well as expanding and strengthening basic education will allow women to compete in labor markets developing a more productive, literate and educated workforce which helps attract job-creating investment.**

4. ***Empower women through increased participation at all levels*-It is essential that space be provided to empower women to participate in all aspects of public life to help reduce the discrimination women face in securing work and in the workplace itself. Mechanisms such as affirmative action policies and quotas enable women to have a voice in the decisions that affect them. We urge the implementation of mechanisms to "formalize" the work of self-employed women by supporting and expanding organizing efforts through trade unions, associations, cooperatives, and self-help groups.**

5. ***Enhance mechanisms to combat the exploitation of women migrants*-Women migrants must enjoy the same rights and protections as all other citizens of a country, regardless of their movement within or across national boundaries. However when human traffickers and other exploiters/clients prey on women and girls, we call on governments and the international community to implement stiff penalties against those who exploit women, ensuring adequate protection and providing services to victims, and working to end the demand for such exploitation.**

Note: Statement endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Dominican Leadership Conference, Elizabeth Seton Federation, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Pax Romana, Salesian Missions, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and VIVAT International.